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SOCIAL SCIENCE

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In the "Outline of Social Science" published in the April number of the *Elementary School Teacher*, an attempt was made to indicate *how* first-hand experiences in social, industrial, and political life, which touch the child on every hand, may be organized into a working force for intelligently constructing history and also for defining the child to himself in terms of the great complex life in which he finds himself. The motive of the present article is to deal with the *why*, and also to answer briefly some of the objections that may be raised in opposition to the teaching of social science in the elementary schools.

To get a reasonable working hypothesis it may be well to call to mind the significance of a movement that is now a matter of history. Here we shall find the genesis of the new movement in modern education.

Not many decades ago educators had begun to realize that the tendency of the school world was to divorce the child from the real world. Instead of coming in contact with things—their relations and interrelations—his whole energy and attention were centered on learning many more or less useful, but wholly unrelated, facts about things. The scholar was distinguished by his ability to know—by his knowledge—regardless of his utter failure, perhaps, as a constructive doer. He was so busily engaged in memorizing the ideas and opinions of others that he had little time and often less inclination to formulate ideas and opinions of his own. Children of a larger, as well as those of a lesser, growth were often prodigies in their ability to follow the calf-paths of the mind, but they were often startlingly deficient in their ability to blaze new trails. The whole idea at that time, controlling the school and shaping the work, was to prepare for high school, college, and going out into the world. The motto writ large, so

that he who would might read, was: "Be miserable now. Glory, fame, pleasure unspeakable, power and dignity of office, are just around the corner."

A few there were even in those good old days of settled opinions who had begun to think that life is growth; that it is with us always; that we are in the here and the now realizing a large, rich, full-orbed life, or a mean, petty, cramped, and dwarfish life; that the life now large or small is the precursor of the life that is to be—the foundation upon which it must be built. They had also begun to realize that every child born into the world is the center of his own universe. About him prairie and forest, mountain and stream, bird and beast, range themselves. About him planets, stars, and suns sweep and blaze and burn. In fact, all that he can ever know of earthly form and color, of heavenly splendor, of visible and invisible worlds, must be built out of and upon the ideas that are poured in through eye and ear and muscular sense. So nature-study was ushered—nay, forced itself—into the course of study. Thus a study of things became a necessary preparation for a study about things.

This is neither the time nor the place to comment on how this primary impulse and spirit of nature-study has been thwarted and deadened by the old show of things; how it became one more line added to the knowledge about things, nor of how it took the more practical, but equally deadening, point of view which may be summed up in: "What form of life interferes with you most? Kill it." It is better to deal with the spirit that ushered it in, however much blind leaders of the blind may have thwarted and deadened that spirit.

Nature-study, then, is a study of things: what they are; what they do; how they do it; or of what they have done, are doing, purpose to do; their motive. Thus the movement may be from groups of individuals to individuals in groups; a study of group relations and group conduct. Upon this foundation, and upon this alone, the world of science not present to the senses may be built.

Now this great realm of nature—this world—includes the child himself in his group relations. From this standpoint we

must determine, not whether we *will*, but whether we *must* take note of social science in our school work. What is the significance of group study? It is the study and organization of the elements out of which are built every form and phase of human thought and activity. It comprehends all history, patriotism, citizenship.

To see this motive-force of history—society grouped and regrouped—in the present, and its significance in giving purpose and meaning to the past, as well as pointing to all the future, it may be well to consider for a moment an attitude of mind toward history.

Aside from the deep and permanent influence of Hebrew literature, it seems quite unnecessary to take much note of oriental civilization, as western civilization was only indirectly affected by it. True, the Persian invasion welded the people of Greece together in defense of home and country, revealed their power and resources to them, and had a tendency to bind them together by ties of common memories, if not common interests. Yet the tendency in Greece was ever toward individual freedom from the larger group interests, that is, *freedom for the free men*. It may have been this tendency which gave rise to the versatility of Greek genius, her sculpture and painting, her poetry and philosophy, which remain the wonder and the inspiration of all ages, and through which Greece bequeathed to the world the mighty impulse called progress.

The tendency in Rome was toward freedom in terms of Roman citizenship. This tendency gave rise to the great body of laws which sought to incorporate, interpret, and define the social and political rights of the individual and to define his obligations and limitations in his relation to the state. These laws, thus formulated and defined, form the basis of modern jurisprudence. The extension of citizenship through the vast cosmopolitan organization known as the Roman Empire, thus recognizing the political brotherhood of man; the fostering of the central idea in Christianity, thus recognizing the higher brotherhood; the extending of law and order and systems of political organization, have been Rome's contribution to modern civilization.

The Teuton attempted to solve the problem of representative government; of extending and enlarging the social and political rights of man; of instituting constitutional forms of government that grow directly out of, and rest upon, the consent of the governed; of proclaiming the doctrine that all men are created equal in their right to aspire to develop and to realize the best that is in them, an idea which must eventually leave no place in their thought for the bondman or the slave.

This tendency toward freedom, transferred to the untrammelled West, blossomed in this republic of ours. It is the expression of a people's thought and feeling transplanted to a new world and modified by the new conditions in the new environment. It is the thought and feeling of a people enacted into law as they were changed and shaped and fashioned on the anvil of experience by the hammers of toil and suffering, of privations and sorrow, of splendid courage and noble self-sacrifice during all of the years required to cause the wilderness to blossom as the rose. For the first time on a broad and comprehensive plan the rights of the world's down-most were clearly recognized, and a broader and a nobler meaning was written into the term "citizenship." This generic idea gave rise to the public-school system whose mission is "to preserve the past, conserve the present, and shape the future."

The foregoing is intended merely as an outline suggestive of the stream of history flowing into and shaping the life of the present. It is also intended to suggest that the permanent things of history, the ones that have endured, are those most worthy of study. All the facts of history which may lay claim to the student's attention are those which revolve about these vital principles, aiding or retarding their development, or adapting them to new conditions. Before he can appreciate this causal movement in history the child must first become conscious of the institutions which constitute his life as well as the life of society. That is, he must deal with the institutions that came to be before he can appreciate or intelligently understand *the processes by which they came to be*. Through the study of history, as he learns to appreciate the vast expenditure of time, men, and

money required to shape these institutions to what they now are, a larger and a more significant meaning will be written into these institutions.

If the above assumption is even in a measure true, then the study of social science, the study of groups and group relations which touch the child on every hand—call it by whatever name you will—is just as essential a foundation for the purposeful study of history as is the study of nature as a foundation on which to build the sciences. Out of the material of the here and the now the child will rebuild the unseen past and construct the still more progressive future.

This is the *justification of*, and the *necessity for*, the study of social science in the elementary schools.

The objections and the objectors to that study may be dealt with briefly.

Of course, conservatism, which sums itself up in “our safe and sound leaders of educative thought,” will stand aghast at the bare idea of adding one more subject to an already overcrowded and bewildering course of study. (They evidently overlook the fact that the principle of elimination applied to the husks in the overcrowded course would soon reduce it to a reasonable working basis.) They still earnestly plead for a better mastering of the *essentials* of an education, reserving the right, of course, to *name* the essentials. They will still continue to give little time or consideration to weighing the difference between what a child really needs to know and to do in terms of his own growth and development, and what is assumed ought to be known in terms of the subject-matter divided by the number of school years!

The teacher, now driven to the verge of distraction in a vain endeavor to “jam in, cram in” all of the facts now embodied in the outline for her grade, will groan in anguish of spirit at this added burden—this new thing to be held accountable for. The requirements, pressed down from above, won’t let her realize even for a moment that the child is her only subject, the world of matter and idea, the material from which to choose her means; *what he is*, the only legitimate test of her work.

We as teachers must all learn to realize that, if the old subject-matter system lays claims to the man in the White House, it must with equal consistency lay claim to the individual who has reached potter's field by way of the gallows. We must also realize that scholarship is not, has never been, synonymous with character. We must come to know that the quality of knowledge, not the amount, determines the quality of the individual.

"It is the duty of each individual to be born a man of social tendencies which his communal tradition requires of him; if he persist in being born a different sort of man, then, as far as his variation goes, he is liable to be found a criminal before the bar of public conscience and law, and to be suppressed in an asylum or a reformatory, in Siberia or in the potter's field."¹

It is at least one of the functions of the public schools to determine the ideals toward which the individual aspires.

Another class of objectors will be found among the educators who still long for the good old-fashioned education which taught children to know things and to do things, and which never worried either the teacher or the children with the why of the knowing or doing. Their philosophy may be summed up in a simple problem in subtraction, 21-9. "The child should be taught 9 from 1 I cannot take, so I borrow one from the 2. Nine from 11 leaves 2 and 1 borrowed from the 2 leaves 1, hence 12!" It is so simple! Such philosophy is born of the time-worn platitude: "The child learns to do by doing, and doesn't reason at first." Out of nothing something comes! He will reason after while! When he teaches school, perhaps!

The members of this class will also throw their hands up in horror at this new attempt to cause a child to realize himself and his functions in terms of others; to cause him to know that *humanity* and *service* are the largest words yet written in the vocabulary of man. Or they may hedge by saying: "All this is well enough after the child has mastered the essentials." They may assume the position of the authority on reading who says: "After the child has learned to read, the wise teacher begins to

¹ Baldwin's *Social and Ethical Interpretations*.

look about for reading matter that is worth while," and who evidently ignores the pertinent question: "Why shouldn't the wise teacher look about long before that interesting phase of development is reached?"

In spite of conservatism, time element, what-not, these new forces must dominate both schools and teachers. We may retard, we cannot stop, the new demand of a new time in our work.

With the course of study as now arranged, where shall we find time for work in social science? We shall take time from problems in arithmetic which have naught to do with the child's life and precious little to do with adult life. We shall take it from the time usually devoted to the reading of scraps of literature found in the average reader, selections which are utterly devoid of any thrill or stimulus toward a higher life. We shall take it from the time given to that portion of geography, as now taught, which has nothing to do with the heavens above, the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth. We may take some time from some of the handwork with great profit.

It may be permissible to digress at this point for a moment to make the meaning clear.

"The child epitomizes the race;" therefore, because his ancestors (considerably remote) gathered and selected grasses and made baskets under the stress of necessity, it becomes vitally essential that grasses be gathered and baskets be woven, willy nilly, by every child of school age from Maine to the Golden Gate until some of us shy at grasses and raffia in the school-room more than we did at the old-time birch!

This is no disparagement of handwork. It simply raises the question as to whether the handwork of today should be based, to any great extent, on by-gone conditions. The mistake, if one exists, lies in assuming that the simple is necessarily so to the child, though far removed in time and thought, instead of believing that the known and necessary are simple however complex apparently, and that the far-off, the unknown, is complex however simple it may seem.

In dealing with social science we must be careful to avoid one factor which has greatly disturbed the educational vision in some quarters, that is, the bugbear of environment. Some of us

are prone to believe that environment merely refers to the little physical pocket in which we happen to find ourselves. It is well to recognize this physical environment, for, as has been said, it is a factor with which we must deal. We must build our world out of the material of every phase and form of life found therein. But we must not stop here. We must go on to realize the spiritual environment in terms of the accumulated treasures of the ages, preserved in song and story; in scientific discoveries; in bronze or marble or on the glowing canvas; and in the uplifting message of the poet, prophet, and seer. From the environment of the vicinity the child must be led to the contemplation of the universe; from the world-wide, material environment, to the highest spiritual environment yet penned or pictured. On this basis, from this standpoint, must we settle the question as to whether the teacher shall be one of the group, or whether there shall be a group and a teacher requiring new groups with new leaders.

Shall we as teachers ever fully realize that there is but one subject for us to teach, that is, the child? Shall we ever realize that he is the exhaustible quantity, the subject-matter the inexhaustible quantity, so far as he is concerned? Shall we realize that we must finally turn from the subject as an end to regard it wholly as a means? Shall we, instead of assuming the facts that ought to be known, determine what will best meet the needs of the period of growth with which we have to deal? Shall we all finally realize that the self grows in the body as the plant grows in the soil, and that all the teacher can do in the process is to make conditions for the grower to have free access to the sunshine, light, warmth, soil, moisture, the factors of material and spiritual life and growth? When such an idea prevails we shall cease to worry over teaching all that the course of study contains as a minimum. We shall know that children, like ourselves, will continue to forget nine-tenths of all that we thought so essential for them to learn each day. We shall know that the growth toward a larger and larger self—*the is* and *the ought to be*—which sums itself up in conduct and character, in the ability to know and to do, to aspire and to be, is the end and aim of school and culture.